



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For Release: Jan. 30, 2020

Media contact: Sherry Llewellyn, 410-313-2236
HCPDnews@howardcountymd.gov

Howard County police launch one-year drone field test

The Howard County Police Department is announcing the launch of a one-year field test to use drones in police operations. The program is the result of a recommendation in November from a workgroup that researched the technology for five months and proposed purchasing three drones for the field test.

Over the last eight weeks, police have trained 10 officers who will stay in their current assignments and respond to incidents when a drone is needed. They have been trained and certified as remote pilots, known as the “Part 107” certification, as required by the FAA.

“This is another step forward in our commitment to the safety and security of our residents,” said Police Chief Lisa Myers. “As technology evolves, our agency will continue to evolve with it to ensure we are providing the most effective ways to protect our communities. The drones can help us in search-and-rescue operations and provide real-time information in potentially dangerous crisis situations.”

The HCPD will follow public guidelines from the ACLU to ensure the community can benefit from drone technology without privacy concerns. The department policy allows the use of drones in situations when life and safety are at risk; when there are specific and articulable grounds to believe that the drone will collect evidence relating to criminal activity; or when there is a signed search warrant from a judge for areas covered under the Fourth Amendment, which protects individuals from unreasonable search and seizure. They will not be used for mass surveillance that could violate First Amendment-protected activities.

Images taken by the three drones will not be retained unless there is reasonable suspicion that they contain evidence of criminal activity or are relevant to an ongoing investigation or pending criminal trial. Images that do not possess any evidentiary value will be deleted.

“Howard County is known throughout our state and nation as one of America’s safest communities. The launch of the drone program by the Howard County Police Department comes after months of research, testing, and piloting this innovative drone technology,” said Howard County Executive Calvin Ball. “I’m thrilled to see the drone program get off the ground, allowing the HCPD to be more effective and efficient, while continuing to protect all our residents’ safety and civil liberties.”

The total cost for the three drones is \$33,800 and was funded in large part by a \$20,000 contribution from the Howard County Police Foundation.

“The Howard County Police Foundation is proud to be able to support the purchase of emerging technologies that help the HCPD provide the most cost-effective crime prevention strategies to the community,” said Foundation President Kyri Jacobs.

The drone workgroup included representatives from police operations and administration, union leaders, risk management, policy development, training and public information. The group also includes the HCPD Citizens’ Advisory Council and Police Foundation, the Howard County Office of Law and the Sheriff’s Office.

Throughout the one-year field test period the police department will continue to monitor and evaluate the program.

###